

THE NICENE CREED: THE SAVING WORK OF THE SON

*παθόντα, καὶ ἀναστάντα τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ,
ἀνελθόντα εἰς τοὺς οὐρανοὺς...*

*He suffered, and the third day He rose again,
ascended into heaven...*

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The Nicene Creed has been a fundamental statement of the Christian faith, rooted in the truth of Scripture, since it was crafted in AD 325. Although it was written 1,700 years ago, it continues to serve the church well in affirming the truth about the Person and work of Christ. This article will focus on the Son's saving work in the Nicene Creed and examine the core of the Christian message, reflecting on the statement, "He suffered, and on the third day He rose again, ascended into heaven..." This research will break down the statement, analyzing each event in the text of Scripture and highlighting the significance and beauty of these events, with the hope of providing understanding and encouragement about what Christ did for the believer, as articulated in this part of the creed.

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Introduction

The significance of the Nicene Creed is immense. It emerged when the church was combating heresy and, as Kevin DeYoung states, "trying to discern how best to articulate the doctrine of the Trinity and define the person of Christ."¹ From the work at Nicaea, the church gained a beautiful treasure grounded in Scripture that remains

¹ Kevin DeYoung, *The Nicene Creed: What You Need to Know about the Most Important Creed Ever Written*, Foundational Tools for Our Faith (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2025), 15.

valuable 1,700 years later. The term “creed” derives from the Latin term *credo*, which means “I believe,” and the first words in the Nicene Creed are “we believe,” or πιστεύομεν in Greek.² These are powerful words, yet not as powerful as the truth on which they are based. Language is essential; words have meaning; and thus language shapes one’s understanding of the truth. The language of the Nicene Creed is crucial for conveying the truth of Scripture and reflects the beauty of what Christ did for believers. This research focuses on the significance of the creed regarding the Son’s saving work. This section of the creed states, “He suffered, and the third day He rose again, ascended into heaven”; in Greek, παθόντα, καὶ ἀναστάντα τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ, ἀνελθόντα εἰς τοὺς οὐρανοὺς. This article argues that the Nicene Creed embodies the truth of what Christ accomplished on behalf of sinners and is rich in theological significance regarding who the Son is and what He did in His saving work of suffering, resurrection, and ascension. It illustrates the beauty of God in salvation while clarifying the central realities of Christianity as testified to in the Word of God.

The Son Suffered

The suffering of Christ often becomes the focal point for Christians as they contemplate the essence of the gospel message and Christ’s salvific work. While this aspect of salvation is central, it represents only one part of the entire Nicene Creed concerning the person and work of Christ. The work of Christ is based on His Person, with salvation being the result of what He accomplished in His suffering through the incarnation. Thus, the creed as a whole is essential for understanding what Christ did in His suffering, resurrection, and ascension for the salvation of those who would believe.³ This first section will explore the narrative in Scripture regarding Christ’s suffering, discuss its theological significance, and highlight the beauty of what occurred.

The Events of the Suffering of the Son

The Nicene Creed states, “He suffered,” which is simply παθόντα in Greek. However, there was no simplicity to what occurred during the Son’s suffering. The narrative of Christ’s suffering is present throughout the four Gospels, providing readers with a complete picture of the events surrounding the Son’s trials and crucifixion. Describing the time that led up to the Son’s arrest, France beautifully sets

² Phillip Cary, *The Nicene Creed: An Introduction* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2023), 17–18. See also DeYoung, *The Nicene Creed*, 27.

³ DeYoung explains, “The Nicene Creed is best known for its affirmation that Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, is of ‘one substance with the Father.’ We are right to focus on the *homoousios* declaration, for it was the most consequential debate at the original Council of Nicaea. At the heart of the creed is this confession related to the person of Christ. But the longest section in the creed is actually related not to the person of Christ but to his work. The transition to this new section occurs with the words ‘who for us and for our salvation.’ It’s easy to overlook this subordinate clause, but these phrases are what make the Nicene Creed tick. If ‘one substance with the Father’ is the heart of the creed, then ‘who for us and for our salvation’ is the beating of that heart. The reason that we care so much about the person of Christ is because of what the doctrine of Christ means for salvation in Christ. Only a Savior who is true God of true God can save us from our God-defying sins. We need a God who comes all the way down to us, and we need one to come down who is fully God unlike us.” DeYoung, *The Nicene Creed*, 53–54.

the context for the suffering of Christ as depicted in Matthew's Gospel in chapter 26, declaring:

The beginning of the passion narrative in Matthew, as in Mark, consists of a "concentric" drawing out of three aspects of the setting. The outer layer, in vv. 1–2 and 17–19, is the approach of the Passover festival, which provides both the historical and the theological context for what is to follow. Within that broader context we hear of the plotting of the priestly authorities against Jesus, and their recruiting of Judas, vv. 3–5 and 14–16. And set within that framework is the symbolic incident of the anointing of Jesus by a woman at Bethany (vv. 6–13). The devotion of this unnamed woman contrasts with the hostility of the priests and the treachery of Judas, while Jesus' interpretation of her act (v. 12) prepares the reader for the success of their plot. But all this is to be understood in the context of the Passover, the festival of God's redemption of his people and the occasion of the covenant which constituted Israel as the people of God.⁴

After Jesus' arrest, Scripture details His trial before both Annas and Caiaphas (Matt 26:57–68; Mark 14:53–68; Luke 22:54–57; John 18:13–24), followed by his trial before Pilate (Matt 27:2, 11–14; Mark 15:1–5; Luke 23:1–5; John 18:28–38). When Pilate discovered a possible way to avoid condemning the One whom he perceived as an innocent man, he sent Jesus to Herod Antipas (Luke 23:6–12), who treated the Son contemptuously. Pilate then received him back, and Jesus was flogged, condemned, crowned with thorns, mocked, and subsequently led away to be crucified (Matt 27:15–34; Mark 15:6–23; Luke 23:13–23; John 18:39–19:17).⁵

The suffering of the Son happened at "The Place of the Skull," outside the city wall, where "they crucified Him, and two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them" (John 19:18).⁶ The fourfold account of the events, as seen in the Gospels' testimony, shows that the focus is on those present at His crucifixion, with the central focus on the suffering of the Son. Köstenberger reminds the reader of what crucifixion entailed,

In ancient times, crucifixion was synonymous with horror and shame, a death inflicted on slaves (Cicero, *In Verrem* 2.5.65.168), bandits (Josephus, *J.W.* 2.13.2 §253), prisoners of war (*J.W.* 5.11.1 §451), and revolutionaries (*Ant.* 17.10.10 §295). Josephus terms it "the most pitiable of deaths" (*J.W.* 7.6.4 §203; cf. 1.4.6 §97), Cicero calls it "that cruel and disgusting penalty" (*In Verrem* 2.5.64.165). . . . For hours (if not days), the victim would hang in the heat of the sun, stripped naked and struggling to breathe. In order to avoid asphyxiation, he had to push himself up with his legs and pull with his arms, triggering muscle spasms that caused almost unimaginable pain. The

⁴ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 969.

⁵ See Robert L. Thomas and Stanley N. Gundry, *A Harmony of the Gospels* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1986), and John F. MacArthur, *One Perfect Life: The Complete Story of the Lord Jesus* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2013).

⁶ All Scripture, unless otherwise cited, is from *The English Standard Version*.

end would come through heart failure, brain damage caused by reduced oxygen supply, suffocation, or shock. Atrocious physical agony, length of torment, and public shame combined to make crucifixion a most horrible form of death.⁷

For those who were present at the crucifixion, the mocking of Christ continued.⁸ Matthew testifies, “And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, ‘You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross’” (Matt 27:39–40). The religious leaders hurled their contempt, “He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, ‘I am the Son of God’” (Matt 27:41–43). Yet as France explains, “But that temptation had already been faced and overcome in Gethsemane (and cf. 26:53–54). Indeed, it is that very relationship as ‘Son of God’ which paradoxically requires Jesus to go through with His Father’s purpose on the cross. In some sense, even the Gentile soldiers will see the truth of this in v. 54.”⁹ Matthew further gives the account that those dying beside Him “also reviled him in the same way” (Matt 27:44).

The Son was not only at the center of ridicule as He hung on the cross but also the source of the salvific event that occurred there. Christ’s suffering on the cross procured salvation for those who believe, which is the significance this research will soon address. Although crucifixion was a common method of execution in Rome, the testimonies of the Gospels make it clear that this suffering was anything but ordinary. The simplest way to understand what happened is to examine what Christ said at the center of the narrative during His suffering, particularly the seven sayings of Christ on the cross.

The first statement is the Son crying out, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). Christ died forgiving those who sinned against Him, even the vilest of sins, the act of killing the Holy One, God in the flesh.¹⁰ Bock explains, “Jesus thus intercedes for his enemies, portraying the very standard he sets for his disciples in the Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:29, 35; 1 Pet. 2:19–23; Ernst 1977: 634).... Thinking of others, Jesus still desires that they change their thinking (as some do in the Book of Acts) and that God not hold their act against them. Jesus’ love is evident even from the cross.”¹¹

⁷ Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 543.

⁸ Those who were present also included those who loved and followed Christ, including the mother of Jesus, Mary, her sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene, yet only one of the twelve disciples was present, John, the disciple whom Jesus loved (John 19:25–27).

⁹ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1070–71.

¹⁰ Note that there is an argument about the origin of this statement and to whom Jesus refers. Is it the Roman executioners, or is it primarily to the Jews? See, I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978), 867–68; W. F. Arndt, *The Gospel according to St. Luke* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1956), 469.

¹¹ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: 9:51–24:53*, vol. 2, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996), 1850.

The second statement of Jesus from the cross is also found in Luke: “Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). This exclamation demonstrates who Christ is and the significance of faith in salvation. The One being crucified between the two criminals was the Prince of Life, the Son of God—something that most at the crucifixion denied, but not the penitent criminal.

The love of the Son is also evident in His third statement from the cross to Mary: “Woman, behold your son,” and then to John: “Behold your mother” (John 19:26–27). Even in this ultimate suffering, Jesus thinks of and cares for others. Regarding the exchange between Jesus and John, where John is given care over Mary, Jesus’ mother, Carson writes, “If Jesus was the breadwinner of the family before he embarked on his public ministry ... it is wonderful to remember that even as he hung dying on a Roman cross, suffering as the Lamb of God, he took thought of and made provision for his mother.”¹²

The fourth statement by the Son is from Matthew 27:46, which references Psalm 22:1: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” This declaration marks the climax of the Son’s suffering, highlighted by a heart-wrenching cry of relational separation. It demonstrates that Christ is enduring the cup of God’s wrath, which He had asked to be spared from the night before in Gethsemane. As France explains, “But it is surely also significant that Jesus, like the abandoned psalmist, still addresses God as ‘my God’; this shout expresses not a loss of faith, but a (temporary) loss of contact.”¹³ Sin separates, and Christ came to bear the sin of those who would believe, becoming the penal substitute by taking their sin upon Himself, along with the wrath and the penalty for sin.

The fifth statement from the cross is “I am thirsty” (John 19:28). These words reveal that Jesus is truly man while also fulfilling Scripture (Ps 69:21). In His incarnation, He needed sleep and food, and here, in this ultimate place of suffering, He was thirsty. The juxtaposition of the fourth and fifth statements is staggering, highlighting that only One who is truly God can take upon Himself humanity’s sin and its penalty (which makes His statement of forsaking all the more amazing and tragic). To be the perfect mediator, He also needed to be truly man.

The sixth statement signifies completion, where the Son cries, “It is finished” (John 19:30). With these words, which consist of just one word in Greek (τετέλεσται), Köstenberger notes, “Jesus triumphantly announces the completion of his mission entrusted to him by the Father at what may be considered the lowest point of his life, his death by crucifixion. Jesus dies on Friday afternoon, with the Sabbath approaching, just as God completed his work of creation at the end of the sixth day in order to rest on the seventh.”¹⁴

¹² D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 616–17.

¹³ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1076–77.

¹⁴ Köstenberger, *John*, 551. Carson digs into the term τετέλεσται, acknowledging that the “verb *teleō* from which this form derives denotes the carrying out of a task, and in religious contexts bears the overtone of fulfilling one’s religious obligations. Accordingly, in the light of the impending cross, Jesus could earlier cry, ‘I have brought you glory on earth by completing (*teleiōsas*; i.e. by accomplishing) the work you gave me to do’ (17:4). ‘Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them *eis telos*—not only ‘to the end’ but to the full extent mandated by his mission. And so, on the brink of death, Jesus cries

The last statement on the cross is where the Son entrusts His spirit to the Father, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:46). Regarding this final statement of Christ on the cross, Garland argues, “The Jewish leaders wanted ‘to lay hands on’ Jesus (20:19) and got their wish; but in the end Jesus gives himself over to his Father’s hands, who ultimately controls his destiny. He entrusts himself to the Father’s saving power. The hand of God will rescue him from the hand of all who hate him (1:71) and who are enemies (1:74).”¹⁵

Many other events occurred when the Son’s suffering ended, highlighting His true identity. These accounts are best reflected in Matthew 27:51–54:

And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, “Truly this was the Son of God!”

The Significance of the Suffering of the Son

The theological significance of the suffering of the Son cannot be overstated. Bruce Demarest notes, “Christ’s death on the cross is not a peripheral issue or a secondary theme; it is the central, indeed crucial doctrine of the faith.”¹⁶ In the suffering and sacrifice of Christ, redemption is accomplished for the believer, reversing the curse that emerged from the Fall in the Garden and fulfilling not only the *protoeuangelion* in Genesis 3:15 but also every other prophecy concerning the central motif of Scripture: salvation through the Son. However, it is also important to note that this work of salvation is integral to the depiction of the Son in the Nicene Creed. As Morgan and Peterson make clear, “Without the Son’s incarnation and spotless life, we would not be saved, for the Son had to be a sinless man to die as our perfect substitute. But Jesus’s incarnation and sinless life do not accomplish salvation; only Jesus’s death and resurrection do that.”¹⁷

What occurred in the suffering of the Son? The narrative is rich with implications derived from Scripture. One scholar makes this observation,

The importance of the cross is reflected in part by the attention Scripture gives to the death of Jesus Christ.... Matthew devoted 33 percent of his gospel to the final week of Jesus’ life, Mark 37 percent, Luke 25 percent,

out, *It is accomplished!*” Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, 621. See also Reiner Schippers, τέλος, in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Lothar Coenen, Erich Beyreuther, and Hans Bietenhard (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 2:59–65.

¹⁵ David E. Garland, *Luke*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 928–29.

¹⁶ Bruce A. Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation: The Doctrine of Salvation*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997), 166.

¹⁷ Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, *Christian Theology: The Biblical Story and Our Faith* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2020), 281.

and John 42 percent. It has been said that in addition to the many prophetic anticipations of the Messiah's death in the OT, there are 175 direct references to his death in the NT.¹⁸

Paul proclaimed, "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures" (1 Cor 15:2–4). This truth is the gospel message, and it is also the message of Scripture. Therefore, what is seen in the prophecy in the Old Testament and the explanation of Christ's suffering in the epistles is rich in theological significance regarding what occurred. This research has briefly covered the Gospel accounts of Jesus' death, which should be considered in terms of their importance from a theological perspective, drawing on a few key texts from Scripture.

The language used in Scripture to describe what Christ accomplished on the cross is varied and multilayered. This language highlights the richness of sacrifice as illustrated by the image of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53, where Isaiah notes that He will suffer to save sinners. Isaiah 53:5–6 reads, "But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all." The sacrificial system anticipated what Christ would do, as the "... Lamb of God, who would take away the sin of the world" (John 1:29), which is why the timing of Passover, coinciding with the crucifixion, is no mere coincidence. Jesus is both the perfect mediator and the sacrifice itself, as the author of Hebrews makes clear, "For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified" (Heb 10:14).

There is also the language of victory, where Jesus was victorious over the forces of evil. In Colossians 2:15, Paul writes, "He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him." F. F. Bruce articulated this truth, from this passage, stating,

Christ by his cross releases his people not only from the guilt of sin but from its hold over them. "He breaks the power of cancelled sin." Not only has he blotted out the record of their indebtedness but he has subjugated those powers whose possession of that damning indictment was a means of controlling them. The very instrument of disgrace and death by which the hostile forces thought they had him in their grasp and had conquered him forever was turned by him into the instrument of their defeat and disablement. As he was suspended there, bound hand and foot to the wood in apparent weakness, they imagined they had him at their mercy, and flung themselves on him with hostile intent. But, far from suffering their attack without resistance, he grappled with them and mastered them, stripping them of the armor in which they trusted, and held them aloft in his outstretched hands, displaying to the

¹⁸ Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 166–67.

universe their helplessness and his own unvanquished strength. Such seems to be the picture painted in these words.¹⁹

It is this victory that enables Paul to declare that there is “now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1) and that nothing can “separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus,” whether “angels or rulers,” “powers,” or “any other created thing” (Rom 8:38–39).

Not only were the powers of darkness conquered when Christ cried “It is finished,” but sin was also defeated through the suffering of the Son, which brought redemption. Redemption is a rich concept found throughout Scripture, from God redeeming Israel from Egypt (Exod 6:6) and Babylon (Isa 43:1–2) to the vivid illustration of Hosea and his wife, whom he would buy back from the slave market (Hos 3:1–5), depicting what God would do for His people. This idea of redemption, and consequently deliverance, is echoed in the New Testament as Ephesians 1:7 states, “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace.”²⁰

One of the most foundational images of Christ’s work in Scripture is the concept of penal substitution, which reveals what he did on the cross for sinners in his suffering. This truth of penal substitution appears in many places in Scripture (Isa 53; Rom 3:25–26; Gal 3:10–14; Col 2:14; Heb 2:14–15), as seen clearly articulated in 1 Peter 3:18, “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.”²¹ Christ takes the sinner’s place as the believer’s substitute, enduring the penalty for sin.²² As Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach state, “penal substitution upholds the truthfulness and justice of God: it is the means by which he saves people for a relationship with himself without going back on his word that sin has to be punished.”²³

Building on the understanding of penal substitution, one can see how justification occurs for the believer, followed by reconciliation, with all three concepts unfolding in Romans 5. Justification is positional and can occur only if the penalty for sin has been paid. As Paul describes, “For while we were still weak, at

¹⁹ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 110–11.

²⁰ The text continues through Ephesians 1:8–10 stating, “which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight, making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fulness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.”

²¹ See Morgan and Peterson, *Christian Theology*, 296–307.

²² MacArthur and Mayhue continue to help the reader understand the concept of penal substitution writing, “In addition to these clear statements, the New Testament attaches the concept of penal substitution to the cross of Christ by using four Greek prepositions that all have a substitutionary force: *peri* (“for,” “concerning”), *dia* (“because of,” “for the sake of”), *anti* (“in place of,” “instead of”), and *hyper* (“on behalf of”). First, Christ “suffered ... for sins” (Gk. *peri hamartiōn*, 1 Pet. 3:18) and thus is “the propitiation for our sins” (Gk. *peri tōn hamartiōn hēmōn*, 1 John 2:2; 4:10). These texts teach that our sins demanded that we suffer under the wrath of God yet that Christ has done this in our place. Second, Jesus is said to have died “for your sake” (Gk. *di’ hymas*, 2 Cor. 8:9; cf. 1 Cor. 8:11), another clear indicator of substitution.” John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 523.

²³ Steve Jeffery, Michael Ovey, and Andrew Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 137.

the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:6–8). As Thomas Schreiner points out concerning Romans 5:6–8, “The idea behind ὑπέρ is that Christ died both as our representative and as our substitute.... he took the punishment we deserved.”²⁴ Jesus became the propitiation for the believer’s sin (Rom 3:25; 1 John 2:2; 4:10). Regarding this idea being worked out in Romans 5, Douglas Moo writes, “Justification language is legal, law-court language, picturing the believer being declared innocent by the judge. Reconciliation language, on the other hand, comes from the world of personal relationships. ‘To reconcile’ means to bring together, or make peace between, two estranged or hostile parties (cf. 1 Cor. 7:11).”²⁵ Because of what God accomplished through the Son’s suffering as a substitute, mankind can now be justified before God and thus reconciled to Him.²⁶

The Son could perform what He did because of the truth of what Scripture testifies regarding His person, in both His deity and humanity, as demonstrated by the Nicene Creed. He is also the Second Adam, as Romans 5:12–21 elaborates, who reversed the curse so that “as one trespass led to the condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men” (Rom 5:18). The suffering of the Son is one aspect of the redemptive work that the Second Adam accomplished through His life, death, resurrection, and ascension, which is affirmed in the Nicene Creed as a whole.

The Beauty of the Suffering of the Son

The topic of beauty in the suffering of the Son may initially seem odd to some. However, it should not be foreign to Christians, as they recognize what took place and the love demonstrated in Christ’s suffering. Jonathan Edwards addresses this concept of beauty in who Christ is and what He has done in His suffering when he wrote: “A sight of the greatness of God in his attributes, may overwhelm men, and be more than they can endure; but the enmity and opposition of the heart, may remain in its full strength, and the will remain inflexible.”²⁷ But he goes on to state, “one glimpse of the moral and spiritual glory of God, and supreme amiableness of Jesus Christ, shining into the heart, overcomes and abolishes this opposition, and inclines

²⁴ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 268.

²⁵ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 311.

²⁶ Morgan and Peterson articulate the truth about the love of the Son and necessity of His two natures in what He did for humankind: “Incredibly, because of his great love for us and in obedience to the Father, the preexistent, eternal, and glorious Son of God humbles himself and voluntarily becomes a man. As one person with two natures (fully divine and fully human), Jesus is uniquely able to save us and represent us. Only God can save, and only a human can represent us as the new Adam. In response to Jesus’s work on our behalf, the Father exalts him to the highest place, which in turn also glorifies the Father.” Morgan and Peterson, *Christian Theology*, 264.

²⁷ Jonathan Edwards, “True Grace, Distinguished from the Experience of Devils,” in *Sermons and Discourses, 1743–1758*, ed. Wilson H. Kinnach and Harry S. Stout, vol. 25, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 635.

the soul to Christ, as it were, by an omnipotent power: so that now, not only the understanding, but the will, and the whole soul receives and embraces the Savior.”²⁸

Because of what Christ did through the brutality of the cross, there is beauty in the fact that “while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8b), which demonstrates that the events and theological significance of the cross are immeasurably beautiful. There are two aspects to the beauty of the Son’s suffering: one is the intimate realization that Christ acted out of love, and the second is understanding what that love provides in the context of salvation.

First, Christians recognize what Christ has done for them through His death and the extent to which He suffered because of His love for sinners. The fact that God would become a man to die in man’s place, most horrifically, reveals the beauty of God’s love, which is personal and directed at the individual as the believer exercises faith in what was accomplished, acknowledging his or her need due to sin and the provision available in Christ. This beauty is illustrated by God’s willingness to condescend and become a man, to tabernacle with humanity (John 1:14), so that He could accomplish what sinful humanity could not. This beauty is evident in the cross, where Christ took on sin, and the penalty for that sin, enduring all the suffering he experienced, so much so that Paul proclaims, “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son” (Col 1:13). Even the hardened centurion who witnessed Christ’s crucifixion got a glimpse of the beauty of the Son in His suffering declaring, “Truly this man was the Son of God” (Mark 15:39).

Second, Christians have their eyes open to an understanding of what Christ did in bringing salvation, enabling the believer to grasp the implications of salvation: a relationship with the God of the universe. As Jonathan Edwards testified, “I have loved the doctrines of the gospel: they have been to my soul like green pastures. The gospel has seemed to me to be the richest treasure; the treasure that I have most desired, and longed that it might dwell richly in me. The way of salvation by Christ has appeared in a general way, glorious and excellent, and most pleasant and beautiful.”²⁹ This reality is what the Christian experiences as he or she comprehends what Christ has accomplished, having the heart enlightened to “know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints” (Eph 1:18). With this prayer, Paul also implores that the Ephesians would understand “what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come” (Eph 1:19–21).

²⁸ Edwards, “True Grace, Distinguished from the Experience of Devils,” 635.

²⁹ Jonathan Edwards, *Letters and Personal Writings*, ed. George S. Claghorn and Harry S. Stout, vol. 16, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 799.

The Son Rose Again on the Third Day

The resurrection of the Son is integral and inextricably linked to the Christian message.³⁰ Yet resurrection must always be connected to the Son's death.³¹ Even as one reads in the Gospel of Luke, as Jesus interacts with the disciples on the road to Emmaus, "And he said to them, 'O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?'" (Luke 24:25–26). Peter proclaimed on Pentecost,

Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. (Acts 2:22–24)

Following "The Suffering of the Son" in the first section of this article, this section will explore what the Nicene Creed says about Christ's resurrection, examining the narrative and theological significance of Scripture regarding the resurrection of the Son, and then noting its beauty.

The Events of the Resurrection of the Son

The Nicene Creed continues to state, "and the third day He rose again" (καὶ ἀναστάντα τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ). All four Gospels provide testimony to the truth of the resurrection. The empty tomb and the presence of eyewitnesses of the risen Christ are key elements of the resurrection narratives.³² The events that occur after Christ's death set the stage for the resurrection. Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate if he could take the body of Jesus to place Him in a freshly hewn tomb in a garden near the place where Christ was crucified (Matt 27:57–66; Mark 15:42–47; Luke 23:50–56; John 19:31–42). Included in the narrative is the fact that the religious leaders approached Pilate on the Day of Preparation, asking for a guard to be placed at the tomb to secure it, so that no one could go and take the body since Jesus said that after three days He would arise. Pilate replied, "'You have a guard of soldiers. Go, make it as secure as you can.' So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a

³⁰ MacArthur and Mayhue state, "There exists no greater event in redemption history than the resurrection of Christ, because it completes and validates his sacrificial death and advances the program of the kingdom with an eternally living King. The resurrection must be believed in order for someone to experience salvation (Rom. 10:9–10)." MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 320–21.

³¹ Morgan and Peterson note, "We have separated Christ's death and resurrection for the sake of our study, but we also must keep them together, as Scripture does (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33–34; John 2:19; 10:17–18; Acts 2:22–24; Rom 4:25; 10:9–10; 1 Cor 15:3–4; 2 Cor 5:15; Phil 3:10; Heb 1:3; 1 Pet 1:11). Jesus's death and resurrection are the core of his saving work. They are distinct events and yet are inseparably joined." Morgan and Peterson, *Christian Theology*, 282–83.

³² Thompson argues concerning the resurrection, "For Luke (and for the proclamation of the early Christians) ... the authentic apostolic *eyewitness* testimony of the historical reality was fundamental." Alan J. Thompson, *The Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus: Luke's Account of God's Unfolding Plan*, ed. D. A. Carson, vol. 27, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2011), 78.

guard” (Matt 27:65–66). Like the events of the Son’s suffering, this work will observe the events of the Son’s resurrection by analyzing those involved in revealing what happened.³³

Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and another Mary, along with several other women, went to the tomb early Sunday morning to anoint the body of Christ (Matt 28:1–8; Mark 16:1–8; Luke 24:1–8; John 20:1–2). When they arrived, the Gospel of Matthew states,

And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.” (Matt 28:2–6)

The interesting aspect of this account is who was at the tomb and who was absent. Jesus was no longer there but had risen, with one commentator stating, “Note the irony that those assigned to guard the corpse themselves become ‘corpses,’ while the one they guarded is already alive.”³⁴

The women who came to the tomb were the ones to whom the angels spoke, declaring what had happened and instructing them to go and tell the disciples what had occurred. The Gospel of Mark testifies to the angel’s commission to the women to be witnesses to what they had seen: “But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you” (Mark 16:6–7).³⁵ In addition, Luke mentions as part of the angelic message the truth that Jesus

³³ France explains the differences and harmony of the Gospel accounts, “The accounts of the finding of the empty tomb in all four gospels display an intriguing mixture of agreement and independence. Negatively, all agree in refraining from giving any account of Jesus actually leaving the tomb (contrast *Gos. Pet.* 9–10 [34–42]), and simply report how the women found it already empty. Positively, all agree on an early morning visit to the tomb by one or more women (one of whom is Mary the Magdalene), on the tomb being empty, and on an encounter with an angel or angels, but each develops the narrative around these elements in different ways. Matthew’s account, as usual, follows a similar pattern to Mark’s, including the important instruction to the disciples to go to Galilee, but adds four distinctive features: the earthquake, the angel rolling away the stone, the effect on the guards, and the women’s meeting with Jesus himself on their way from the tomb. The first three of these are peculiar to Matthew; the last may be compared with the account of Mary the Magdalene meeting Jesus outside the tomb in John 20:14–17.” France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1097.

³⁴ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1100. One can see what occurred with these soldiers in the continuing narrative of Matthew 28:11–15: “While they were going, behold, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place. And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers and said, ‘Tell people, ‘His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.’ And if this comes to the governor’s ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.’ So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day.”

³⁵ Concerning the testimony of the women, Lane interestingly reveals, “The fact that women were the first to receive the announcement of the resurrection is significant in view of contemporary attitudes. Jewish law pronounced women ineligible as witnesses. Early Christian tradition confirms that the reports of the women concerning the empty tomb and Jesus’ resurrection were disregarded or considered

had told them, “Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise” (Luke 24:6–7).

After the women returned to the disciples to inform them of what had happened and that the tomb was empty, Peter and John ran to see what had occurred. John arrived at the empty tomb first and stopped at the entrance, while Peter went in to see for himself. John writes that Peter “saw the linen cloths lying there, and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead” (John 20:6–9).

The first interaction anyone has with Jesus is Mary Magdalene. She is at the tomb, weeping because the body of Christ is gone, and she encounters two angels before meeting Jesus, whom she does not recognize. Jesus asks why she is crying and who she is looking for at the tomb. D. A. Carson explains the interchange between Mary and Jesus: “The first (why are you crying?) becomes mild rebuke; the second (Who is it you are looking for?) becomes an invitation to reflect on the kind of Messiah she was expecting, and thus to widen her horizons and to recognize that, grand as her devotion to him was, her estimate of him was still far too small. The evangelistic implications for John’s readers are transparent.”³⁶ It is when Jesus mentions her name, “Mary,” that she recognizes him.³⁷ After a short interchange, “Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, ‘I have seen the Lord’—and that he had said these things to her” (John 20:18).³⁸

After appearing to Mary Magdalene and then to the other women (Matt 28:9–10; Luke 24:9–11), Jesus appears to two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13–35) and then before a gathering of his disciples twice, once without Thomas (Luke 24:36–43; John 20:19–23) and then with Thomas (John 20:24–31), allowing them to see His hands, feet, and side. It is during the second appearance in the upper

embarrassing (cf. Lk. 24:11, 22–24; Mk. 16:11). That the news had first been delivered by women was inconvenient and troublesome to the Church, for their testimony lacked value as evidence. The primitive Community would not have invented this detail, which can be explained only on the ground that it was factual.” William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 589.

³⁶ Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, 641.

³⁷ Carson elaborates, “Whatever the cause of her blindness, the single word *Mary*, spoken as Jesus had always uttered it, was enough to remove it. The good shepherd ‘calls his own sheep by name ... and his sheep follow him because they know his voice’ (10:3–4). Anguish and despair are instantly swallowed up by astonishment and delight.” Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, 641.

³⁸ Of the interesting interchange between Jesus and Mary, Köstenberger explains, “Jesus’ reply to her, ‘Don’t hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father,’ highlights the change that has occurred in Jesus’ relationship with his disciples (Ridderbos 1997: 637). In fact, what all of Jesus’ resurrection appearances in John 20–21 reveal is that the disciples now find themselves in a transition period in which they cannot revert to their familiar pattern of relating to their Master during his earthly ministry, yet at the same time they cannot fully grasp the nature of the new spiritual relationship with their Lord that soon will be mediated to them by the Holy Spirit. This transitory condition explains the awkwardness that surrounds the interim between the resurrection of Jesus and the sending of the Spirit.” Köstenberger, *John*, 569. Concerning what was stated Beasley-Murray comments, “The virtual replacement of the language of resurrection with that of ascension is an indication that the two are fundamentally one, and indissolubly bound with the death of Jesus.” George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary 36 (Dallas: Word, 1999), 377.

room that Thomas sees Christ after doubting the others' testimony and proclaims, "My Lord, and my God" (John 20:28).³⁹ The key to all these appearances is that Jesus had risen again and was in physical form, as evidenced by being able to be touched, and He even ate.

Jesus would also appear to the disciples while fishing, beautifully restoring Peter three times after His threefold denial before the crucifixion (John 21:1–25). He then appeared to many disciples in Galilee (Matt 28:16–20; 1 Cor 15:6–7) and later returned to Jerusalem before His ascension (Luke 24:44–49; Acts 1:3–8). In Luke 24:46–47, Jesus is seen teaching the disciples, opening their minds to the Scriptures. He states, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem."

The Significance of the Resurrection of the Son

The resurrection of the Son is the cornerstone of the Christian faith. Chase Mitchell writes concerning the events of the resurrection, "The narratives in the four Gospels introduce us to the one who would bear our sins on the cross and rise from the dead on the third day. His teachings affirmed a future resurrection for the righteous and the wicked, but he himself was raised in the middle of history as the firstfruits of the life that will be ours."⁴⁰ This truth signifies the importance of the resurrection of the Son, a reality that Paul articulated wonderfully in 1 Corinthians 15, the resurrection chapter.

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul addresses the denial of the resurrection of the dead by appealing to the Christian testimony of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, supported by both tradition and the eyewitness accounts of the disciples, which provide the theological foundation for the resurrection and its necessity to the Christian gospel. As Fee asserts, "Paul is not here setting out to *prove* the resurrection of Jesus. Rather, he is reasserting the commonly held ground *from which* he will argue against their assertion that there is no resurrection of the dead."⁴¹

Paul's main issue is that if there is no resurrection from the dead, then Christ has not been raised: "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins" (1 Cor 15:17). The truth of the resurrection is crucial to the Christian faith, because of sin, which serves as the primary foundation of Paul's argument for the necessity of Christ's death and resurrection. Bruce Ware emphasizes this central issue: "Sin is for all of us a twofold problem. Sin presents us with a penalty that we cannot pay and a power that we cannot overcome. And, interestingly, if we inquire just what that penalty is, and what sin's strongest power is, we find that we come to

³⁹ Köstenberger explains, "Jesus' scars on his hands and his side (cf. 19:34) are marks not only of his suffering but also of his victory (Ridderbos 1997: 641). In fact, his mere presence among his followers is evidence of his triumph (cf. 20:5–7; Moloney 1998: 530–31, 534)." Köstenberger, *John*, 572–73.

⁴⁰ Mitchell L. Chase, *Resurrection Hope and the Death of Death*, ed. Miles V. Van Pelt and Dane C. Ortlund, Short Studies in Biblical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 96.

⁴¹ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., Revised Edition, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 797.

the same answer. As Paul says in Romans 6:23, the wages of sin is death.”⁴² Death is the consequence of sin and acts as the great disruptor.⁴³ Death brings separation, manifested physically by the separation of the body and soul, and spiritually by the separation of humankind from a relationship with God, so that, because of Adam’s sin, all humanity is born dead in trespasses and sin (Rom 5:12; Eph 2:1–3).⁴⁴

The testimony of the resurrection reveals that what Christ did—taking the penalty of sin and enduring the wrath of God on behalf of believers—was effective, since the wages of sin is death, yet death could not hold Christ in the grave. Paul’s declaration in Romans states that Jesus “was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification” (Rom 4:25). Since death has held authority over humankind since the fall, and since all were in Adam, it is now evident, “for by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Cor 15:21–22). The resurrection confirms the victory of Christ over sin and the grave, as well as all the powers of evil (1 Cor 15:24–25), with “the last enemy to be destroyed is death” (1 Cor 15:26). Sin received its death blow in the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. This truth undergirds Paul’s entire argument about the resurrection from the dead: “If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied” (1 Cor 15:19). Thus, if the dead are not raised, “let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die” (1 Cor 15:32). Concerning this text, Garland writes,

“In Christ” refers to the source of this hope that “if we have been united together in the likeness of his death, then we shall certainly be united in the likeness of his resurrection” (Rom. 6:5). But if Christ is not raised, then our hope is nothing more than whistling in the dark. Christians become pathetic dupes, taken in by a colossal fraud. Their transformation and glorious spiritual experiences in this life are all make-believe. They are the most pitiable (ἐλλεινότεροι, *eleeinoteroi*) of all human beings because they have embraced Christ’s death and suffering in this life for nothing. Christianity would be an ineffective religion that is detrimental to one’s health since it bestows only suffering on its followers. Suffering the loss of all things because of Christ and sharing his sufferings by becoming like him in his death with the hope of attaining the resurrection (Phil. 3:7–11) turn out to be foolish. The world would be right: the cross is utter folly (1 Cor. 1:23). The joy that characterizes the basic orientation of Christian life is based on the confidence that Christ will return, the dead will be raised, and all wrongs will be made right. If that is not true, then joy is replaced by despair.⁴⁵

⁴² Bruce A. Ware, *The Man Christ Jesus: Theological Reflections on the Humanity of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 131.

⁴³ Chase, *Resurrection Hope*, 15.

⁴⁴ Chase explains, “The outworking of death takes manifold forms. Whatever inhibits, harms, or destroys life is a kind of death. When the biblical authors tell of God’s power that restores, frees, heals, or raises, you are reading about the power of life overcoming the forces of death. The reason resurrection hope is more prevalent in Scripture than it may first seem is because the promises and actions of the God of life pervade the testimony of the biblical authors.” Chase, *Resurrection Hope*, 23–24.

⁴⁵ David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 703.

It is the resurrection that brings hope. Because of the resurrection, “What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body” (1 Cor 15:42–44). Garland continues the testimony of this passage by arguing, “If there is no resurrection of the dead, then death remains unconquered and still holds sway beyond the end as a power set over against God.”⁴⁶

The Beauty of the Resurrection of the Son

The beauty of the Son’s resurrection is evident in what follows in 1 Corinthians 15. Paul continues to discuss the resurrection with increasing intensity, emphasizing its significance for believers. Sin is the great divider, separating humanity from the God who created him. This separation causes every person to wrestle with the concept of death and the consequences of sin, which was not God’s intention when He created men and women as embodied beings to be in relationship with him. Death results from sin. Yet what Christ accomplished through His life, death, and resurrection removes the sting of death caused by its consequences. The beauty of the resurrection is that it brings life from death. As Paul writes, drawing from the Old Testament prophets, “‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’ ‘O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?’” (1 Cor 15:54–55).⁴⁷ Paul continues, “The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 15:56–57).

Michael Reeves captures the beauty of what the Son, as the firstborn of the dead, means to the believer: “The greatest declaration brought about the greatest event since the creation of the world: the inauguration of the new creation. Bursting through death, out of the grave, the Son overturned the old order—or disorder, we should say—of Adam. The reign of death and corruption was undone, and a human being now stood, body and soul, wholly beyond the reign of the curse.”⁴⁸ One sees that an

⁴⁶ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 704.

⁴⁷ Ciampa and Rosner explain, “In Paul’s mind, the final destruction of death requires the resurrection of the dead. In citing Isaiah’s eschatological vision Paul ties God’s triumph over death (and universal salvation) to the resurrection of the body. For Paul, resurrection is the necessary outcome of what God has done in Christ and what he intends to do for his people. Paul’s personification of death, following the lead of both Isaiah 25:8 and Hosea 13:14, depicts it not as the inevitable and benign fate of all humans but as ‘an alien, inimical power,’ nothing less than a tragedy. In the words of Isaiah 25:7, death is ‘the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations.’ Death for Paul is a power that casts its ominous shadow over us all and must be not just removed but defeated. A key emphasis of this whole chapter has been that what is required for complete victory over God’s enemies includes the total defeat of death, ‘not a compromise in which death is allowed to have the body while some other aspect of the human being (the soul? the spirit?) goes marching on.’” Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 833.

⁴⁸ Michael Reeves, *Rejoicing in Christ* (Downer Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 64. Reeves goes on to quote, “J. R. R. Tolkien called that moment a *eucatastrophe*, ‘the greatest eucatastrophe possible,’ in fact. That is, the resurrection was a catastrophic event, but a *good* catastrophic event. Or, to be more precise, a eucatastrophe is ‘*the happy turn* in a story which pierces you with a joy that brings tears ... your whole nature chained in material cause and effect, the chain of death, feels a sudden relief as if a major limb out of joint had suddenly snapped back.” Reeves, *Rejoicing in Christ*, 64.

“otherwise unremarkable tomb in Jerusalem thus became the womb of new creation.”⁴⁹

Worship is a response to beauty, so it is no wonder that many of the most beloved hymns in the Christian faith celebrate the wonder of the cross and the resurrection. The third stanza of “Crown Him with Many Crowns” rejoices,

Crown Him the Lord of Life;
Who triumphed o'er the grave,
And rose victorious in the strife
For those He came to save.
His glories now we sing,
Who died, and rose on high,
Who died eternal life to bring,
And lives that death may die.⁵⁰

The beauty of the Son's resurrection brings hope to a world that holds no hope outside of God. The Son of God breaks into the world by becoming man and living a holy life to take the believer's place, substituting for his or her sin, and then rising again, victorious over the enemy of mankind, death. This kind of hope and beauty deserves a response!

The Son Ascended into Heaven

The ascension of the Son is often overlooked in comparison to other aspects of Christ's saving work; yet, it holds great importance in displaying who He is, concluding His redemptive mission, and in the sending of the Holy Spirit. The Nicene Creed testifies that the Son “ascended to heaven” (ἀνελθόντα εἰς τοὺς οὐρανοὺς). Paul states, “In saying, ‘He ascended,’ what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things” (Eph 4:9–10). Following “The Resurrection of the Son” in the last section of this article, this third section will conclude by exploring what the ascension is, surveying the testimony of Scripture, its theological importance, and its beauty.

The Events of the Ascension

The Lord appeared to many after His resurrection, presenting Himself alive, and He also ministered for forty days, speaking about the kingdom (Acts 1:3). During this time, he opened the Scriptures to His disciples, emphasizing the necessity of His death and resurrection and the salvation His work brings, while also promising the Holy Spirit, who would come in His absence (Luke 24:45–47; Acts 1:4–5). The disciples posed an essential question to Jesus, as seen in Acts 1:6, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom of Israel?” The Son's answer indicates that God's plan

⁴⁹ Reeves, *Rejoicing in Christ*, 64.

⁵⁰ Matthew Bridges, “Crown Him with Many Crowns,” in *The Hymnal for Worship & Celebration* (Waco, TX: Word Music, 1986), Hymn #234.

encompassed far more than the disciples understood, for Jesus replies, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority” (Acts 1:8). From this response, the reader receives the outline for the book of Acts and the beautiful promise of God’s plan: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

From Jesus’ answer concerning the Father’s plan, the narrative of Acts transitions directly to the ascension: “And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven’” (Acts 1:9–11). This event was a crucial part of the Son’s saving work and a testimony to his identity.⁵¹ The eyewitnesses to Christ’s resurrection have now become the eyewitnesses to His ascension, an event of great theological significance. The testimony of the ascension continues in the New Testament, as MacArthur and Mayhue cite, “Christ’s ascension was confirmed by the visions of Stephen (Acts 7:55–56), Paul (Acts 9:3–5; 22:6–8; 26:13–15), and John (Rev. 4:1; 5:6). For Paul, Jesus’ ascension left a lasting impression and was a key element in his salvation experience—the living, risen, ascended, heavenly Messiah spoke to him from heaven.”⁵²

The Significance of the Ascension

The ascension of the Son holds great theological importance. In this event, Christ returns to heaven, from where He came, completing the work God gave Him on earth.⁵³ The Son would return to heaven, being the forerunner, to sit down at the right hand of God the Father in His session, sending the Helper in His absence, preparing a place for believers, and one day returning from heaven. Morgan and Peterson argue, “The ascension is also the prerequisite for the subsequent saving works of Christ: his session, Pentecost, intercession, and second coming.”⁵⁴

A significant aspect of the Son’s ascension is His session, or sitting at the Father’s right hand, which encompasses His ongoing mediatorial work and His

⁵¹ See Morgan and Peterson, *Christian Theology*, 284. Bruce writes concerning the manner of Christ’s ascension, “The words ‘a cloud received him out of their sight’ are reminiscent of those with which the Gospel incident of the transfiguration comes to an end: ‘a cloud came and overshadowed them;’ ... and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, ‘This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!’ And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone” (Luke 9:34–36). They are reminiscent, too, of Jesus’ own language about the parousia of the Son of Man—‘coming in clouds with great power and glory’ (Mark 13:26); ‘coming with the clouds of heaven’ (Mark 14:62). The transfiguration, the ascension (as here described), and the parousia are three successive manifestations of Jesus’ divine glory.” F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 37–38.

⁵² MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 322. See also Luke 24:50–52.

⁵³ On the necessity of Christ ascending bodily as one person with two natures see Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 630; and Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger, vol. 2 (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992–1997), 367.

⁵⁴ Morgan and Peterson, *Christian Theology*, 284–85.

authority in exaltation. Upon coming to heaven from earth, the Son presented His sacrifice in a temple made without hands (Heb 8:5; 9:11–12; 23–24) and then sits down (Heb 10:12), demonstrating His completed work of redemption as the perfect Priest.⁵⁵ However, Christ's mediatorial work continues as He intercedes for the saints in heaven, as Berkhof claims, being an authorized intercessor who "never fails" in His intercession.⁵⁶ By sitting down after His passion and resurrection at the Father's right hand as both Lord and Christ in the fulfillment of Psalm 110, Christ, being truly God and truly man, occupies His rightful place, a position of exaltation.

Another crucial aspect of the ascension is that for the Son to send the Spirit, He needed to ascend to heaven, as Christ states in John 16:7, "Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you." The Holy Spirit applies salvation by imparting the power behind Christ's call to discipleship and the Great Commission to live holy lives and witness in power. As Sinclair Ferguson writes, "Pentecost publicly marks the transition from the old to the new covenant, and signifies the commencement of the 'now' of the day of salvation (2 Cor. 6:2). It is the threshold of the last days, and inaugurates the new era in which the eschatological life of the future invades the present evil age in a proleptic manner."⁵⁷ The Holy Spirit would come not only to bring inspiration to the New Testament authors, but also to bring illumination, conviction, conversion, communion, and power to proclaim the gospel and live the Christian life to all believers.⁵⁸

When Christ ascended, He did so to prepare a place for believers, as He states in the Gospel of John, "In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going" (John 14:2–4). Here, Christ encourages His disciples with a glorious truth. As Köstenberger argues, "Jesus thus conveys to His followers a vision of future heavenly living that surpasses even that enjoyed by the most exalted ruler or wealthy person of that day."⁵⁹ The believer's final home will be heaven, where God, the One who created humankind for Himself, is, and Christ went to prepare a place there for those whom He saved.

⁵⁵ See Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:634–35. Moo makes an important note, "In contrast to the many priests who 'stand' at their ministry is the one priest who, having completed his atoning ministry, now 'sits.' The 'offering that Jesus our priest makes is sometimes thought to refer narrowly to his offering of his own blood before the Father in the heavenly sanctuary. However, as I have argued elsewhere, 'offer' (προσφέρω) appears to be used by our author to refer to the entire sacrificial process, including the death of the victim. Here, then, he will be referring to Christ's sacrificial work as a whole, at least including death, resurrection, ascension, and entrance into the heavenly sanctuary. The sequence of events culminates in Christ's sitting down at the right hand of God. As is often noted, the act of sitting suggests the completion of a particular process. 'A seated priest is the guarantee of a finished work and an accepted sacrifice.' 'He sat down' is the equivalent of the Johannine 'it is finished' (John 19:30). Douglas J. Moo, *Hebrews*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2024), 361.

⁵⁶ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1938), 405.

⁵⁷ Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, ed. Gerald Bray, *Contours of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 57.

⁵⁸ Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, 69–72.

⁵⁹ Köstenberger, *John*, 426.

The angels proclaimed that Christ's return would be in the same way as His ascension. Jesus would come back, and His return would be personal, visible, and glorious.⁶⁰ The promise of the Son's return signifies fulfillment. Christ left as the forerunner, assuring Christians that they would follow Him one day.⁶¹ When He arrives in His Second Advent, in the same manner as He ascended, He will bring His reign to earth in the millennial kingdom, ultimately leading to the final judgment and then restoration in the new heavens and the new earth (Rev 21–22).

The significance of the ascension is often unnoticed, yet it holds profound theological significance. It is an aspect of Christ's work that the Nicene Creed emphasizes as essential to the Christian faith and is something Christians must understand as connected to the saving work of the Son. As Patrick Schreiner attests: "Christ's ascension was not an afterthought, nor a superfluous rubber stamp on the truth of the resurrection. It was a unique event in its own right. It confirmed and vindicated Jesus' authority as prophet, priest, and king. However, it did more than this. It not only confirmed Christ's work, but contributed to and even continues Christ's work."⁶²

The Beauty of the Ascension of the Son

The beauty of the ascension rests on two main facets of Christology: who Christ is and what He does. This truth is embraced by the Nicene Creed, which emphasizes the ongoing ministry of the Son even after His redeeming work on earth had been completed. There is beauty in the significance of the ascension, as Christ's care and concern for the believer continue even in heaven. The ramifications of Christ's ongoing work and the permanence of the incarnation demonstrate His depth of love for those He came to save. The beauty of the ascension lies in Christ taking His rightful place at the right hand of God and in the sending of the Holy Spirit, whose ministry is to open the eyes of sinners to see God's beauty, thereby enabling growth and discipleship. As He sends the Holy Spirit, He also continues to intercede for believers at the Father's right hand. Yet, one of the most beautiful aspects of the ascension is that Christ has gone to prepare a place as a forerunner to "a better country, that is, a heavenly one" (Heb 11:16), where the treasure is God Himself.

The ramifications of the session of the Son are evident in the beginning of the eschatological fulfillment of Psalm 110, the most often quoted text in the New Testament, which also sets the stage for what would come in Christ's Second Advent. There is a beauty here pointing to the overall work of the Son, as Allen attests of Psalm 110: "The text became a prime testimony in the theological process of exegeting the person and work of Jesus. Several NT texts, such as Rom 8:34; Col 3:1; Eph 1:20; 1 Pet 3:18–22, appear to attest its presence in a confessional christological tradition that traced the suffering, resurrection, and ascension of Christ in a comprehensive formula."⁶³ It is the reality of the person of Christ, in both His

⁶⁰ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:638.

⁶¹ Morgan and Peterson, *Christian Theology*, 285.

⁶² Patrick Schreiner, *The Ascension of Christ: Recovering a Neglected Doctrine* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2020), 115–16.

⁶³ Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, vol. 21, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 2002), 119.

deity and humanity, that underscores who He is and what He has done even in His session. As Turretin reminds the reader, this is “the glorious state of Christ’s person and the administration of the mediatorial office, whose works ... are common to the whole person with respect to both natures.”⁶⁴ Concerning the incarnation, it is stunning to see the extent of what Christ did, even in understanding its permanence; by sitting down at the Father’s right hand, He has done so as One who is truly God and truly man.⁶⁵ As Hebrews 4:14–16 shows:

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

There is also beauty in Christ’s sending of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit opens the believer’s eyes to Christ’s beauty, making spiritual growth possible. Jonathan Edwards declared, “The Spirit of God is given to the true saints to dwell in them, as his proper lasting abode; and to influence their hearts, as a principle of new nature, or as a divine supernatural spring of life and action.... And he is represented as being there so united to the faculties of the soul, that he becomes there a principle or spring of new nature and life.”⁶⁶ Without the Helper, the believer would not see the beauty of Christ and have his or her affections changed. Additionally, a sustained sight comes with the Spirit’s work of illuminating the truth, which continues to sanctify and drive the believer toward the goal of faith, which is God Himself.

Finally, behind the ongoing work of Christ in the ascension lies the understanding of culmination and communion. The culmination will come with the ultimate restoration of all things, which believers will experience due to their relationship with the Son, who has gone to prepare a place for them. MacArthur and Mayhue delve into the beautiful picture of heaven and communion with the Son, stating,

Indeed, such communion with Christ seems to be the import of Scripture speaking jointly of God and the Lamb (the slain Savior) when revealing the happiness of the saints in heaven: “For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (Rev. 7:17). Also, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away” (Rev. 21:3–4). The word translated “dwelling place”

⁶⁴ Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2:370.

⁶⁵ Morgan and Peterson, *Christian Theology*, 262–63.

⁶⁶ Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, ed. John H. Smith and Harry S. Stout, *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959), 200.

here is the same word sometimes translated “tabernacle” in signifying the flesh of Christ (John 1:14). Finally, the apostle John declares, “And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb” (Rev. 21:22–23).⁶⁷

Reflecting on the Son’s saving work brings a joyful opportunity to appreciate the depth and beauty of what God the Father has accomplished through Christ in the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The work of redemption is complete; it is finished. However, Christ’s ministry continues for believers in heaven, making the ascension a lasting wonder for them. Christ maintains His care and concern for believers in a place He is preparing for those who are saved, which is beautiful because He is there.

Conclusion

The Nicene Creed emphasizes the importance of the Son and His saving work, highlighting the beauty of God’s plan in salvation while clarifying the central doctrines of Christianity as affirmed in the Word of God. The testimony of Scripture serves as the foundation of the Christian faith, which the Nicene Creed upholds as it reflects on the Son’s saving work in His suffering, resurrection, and ascension. Christ’s work saves; yet it ultimately reveals the glory of Christ, as Paul testified in 2 Corinthians 4:4. Michael Reeves points out concerning 2 Corinthians 4:4 and the glory of Christ, “For Paul, the gospel could not be about anything else first. It could not be about forgiveness first or justification first, for what is the point of being forgiven and justified? Not simply that we might stand forgiven and righteous in heaven. We are forgiven in order to know and enjoy Christ. Knowing him is the only true life.”⁶⁸ The Nicene Creed highlights the Son’s glory in His saving work, as revealed in Scripture—a reality that is true as testified in the text of Scripture, of great theological importance in demonstrating God’s goodness in His grace, and beautiful in revealing His love and plan for sinners.

⁶⁷ MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 327.

⁶⁸ Reeves, *Rejoicing in Christ*, 121.